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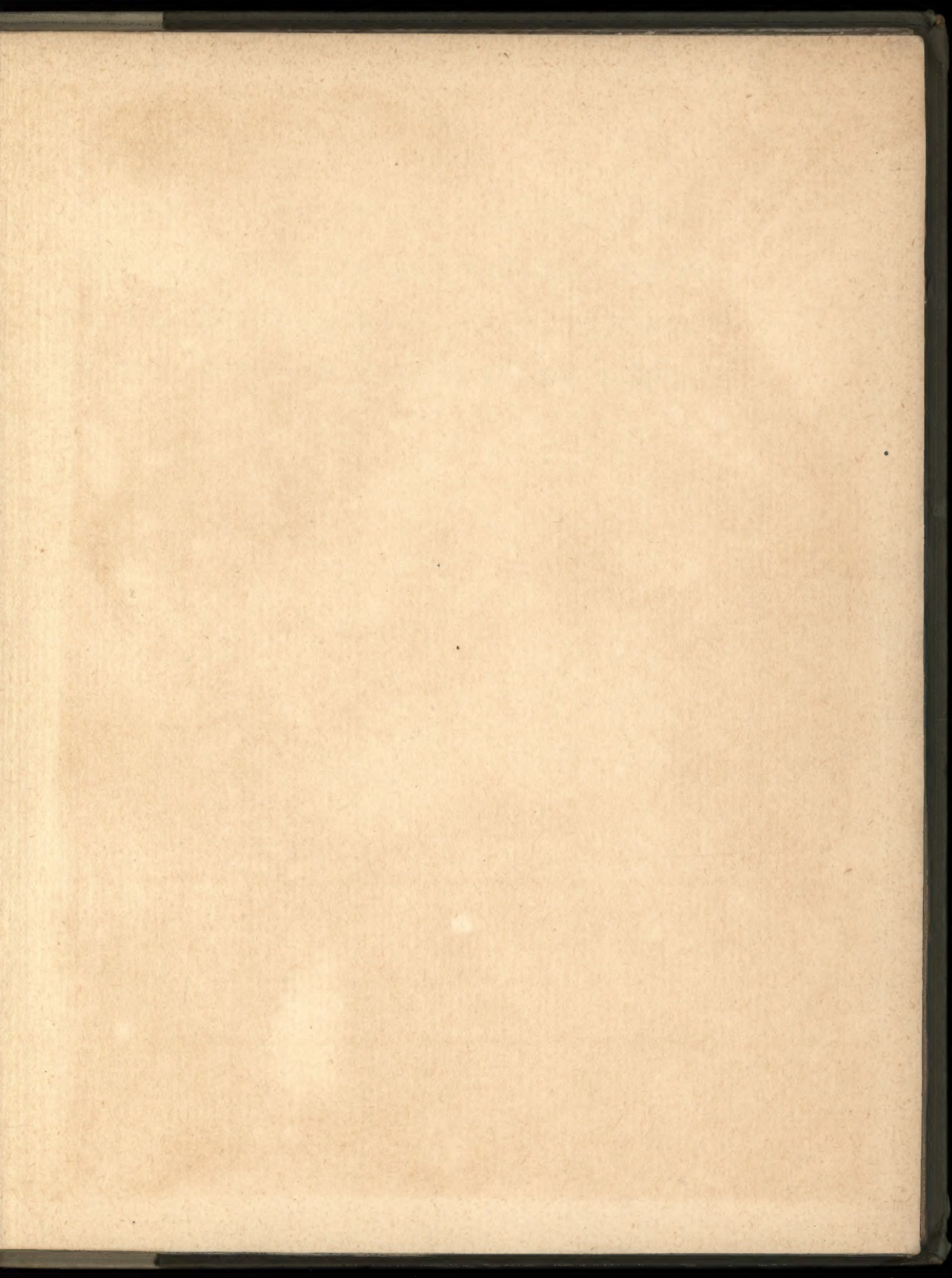
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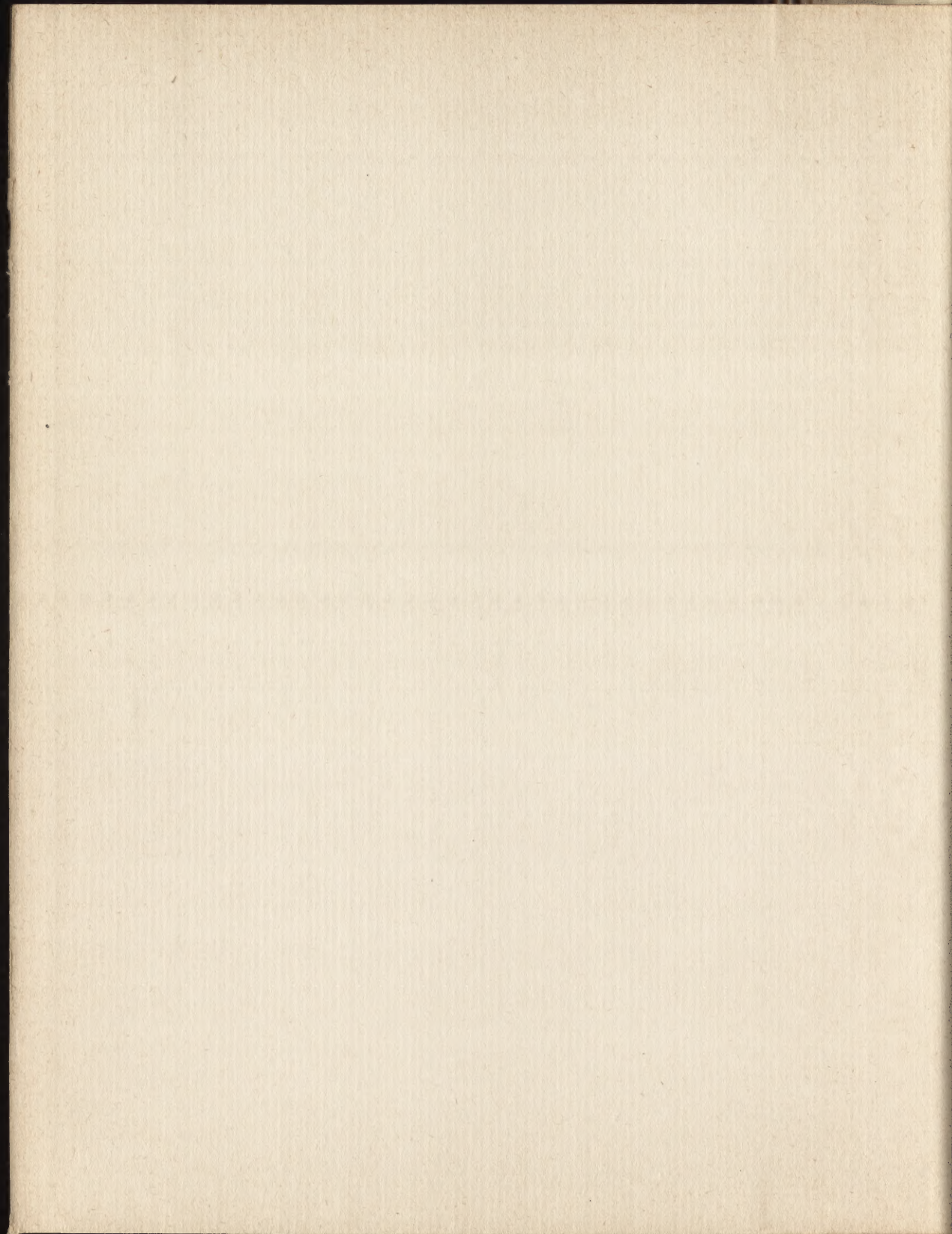
THE ARTIST'S LIBRARY

ALTDORFER

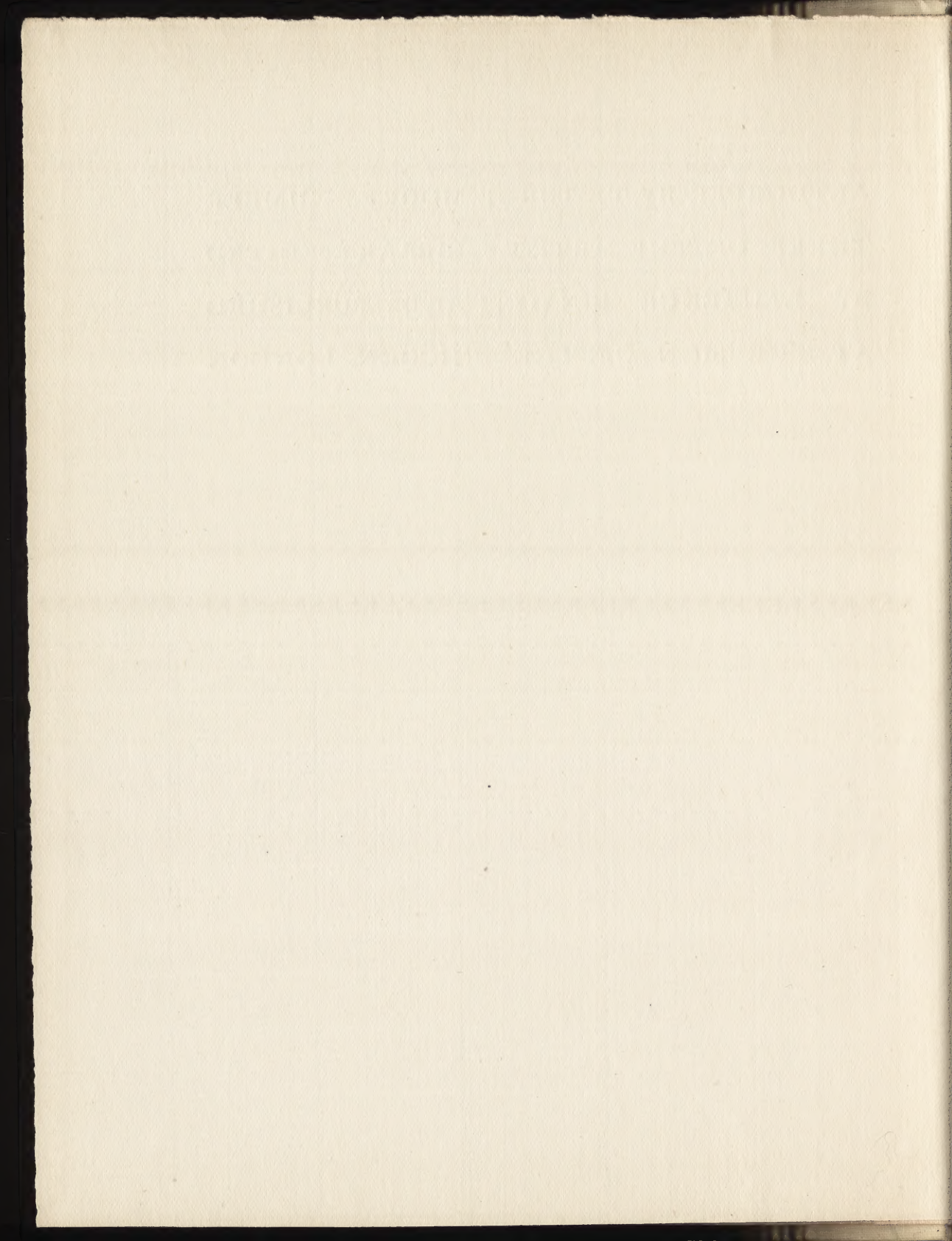
By T. STURGE MOORE

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ALTDORFER

BY T. STURGE MOORE

LONDON MDCCCC
AT THE SIGN OF THE UNICORN

EDINBURGH: PRINTED BY MORRISON AND GIBB LIMITED

PREFACE

THIS little book has been delayed by the attempt to make the illustrations as representative as possible. In the meantime Dr. Schmidt has published a photograph in the Munich *Handzeichnungen Alter Meister* of both surfaces of a wood block on which is a design by Altdorfer partly cut, the reverse being a few slight sketches. Examination of this photograph strengthens my opinion that Mr. C. S. Ricketts is justified in considering Altdorfer as his own interpreter on the wood block; nevertheless it can hardly be held to furnish an absolute proof that he was so.

The illustrations, seven at least of which now appear for the first time, give, I believe, a far more adequate view of Altdorfer's work than has hitherto ever been presented to the public; and when the volume of the proposed series entitled *Little Engravings*, which is to contain the whole of his work on wood, is added, as the Unicorn Press intends it soon shall be, every artist will have to hand ample material for a profitable study of our artist.

I have now only to express my thanks to Mr. Campbell Dodgson of the British Museum for generously laying the stores of his erudition on this and similar subjects at my disposal, and, with Mr. L. Binyon, supplying my deficiency in German. I must also thank Dr. Lippmann of Berlin, the Ritter von Lanna of Prague, Dr. Dörnhöffer of the Imperial Library, and Director Joseph Schönbrunner of the Albertina at Vienna, Pater Czerny of St. Florian, Dr. Boll of the Munich Library, and many others, for the kindness with which they furthered me towards the attainment of the object of my travel, in the various lands through which the pictures or drawings of Altdorfer led me. The Directors of the Galleries at Bremen and at Sigmaringen have also kindly helped in the photographing of pictures under their charge.

The biographical part of the book owes much to the work of Dr. Friedländer (1891), and to the very full article by Dr. Schmidt in Meyer's *Künstler-Lexicon*.

T. STURGE MOORE.

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INTRODUCTION

I

WHAT is the vital question before a picture—who painted it, when and where it was painted, how it was painted; or, why it was painted, what it does for us, how it does this? For my own part, I confess that the first three questions seem of minor importance. Doubtless the best pictures were all painted by the best artists. It is no great matter what names they bore, when and how they lived, where and with whom. So we but know great pictures, we cannot fail to know great artists in a direct and satisfying manner; not, indeed, face to face, but spirit to spirit.

What are the master motives that should govern the painting of pictures? Some cry, a desire to imitate nature—to deceive the eye,—a sad avowal.

“We’re made so that we love
First when we see them painted, things we have passed
Perhaps a hundred times,”

as Browning makes Fra Lippo Lippi say; but can it be a rational end to love things unworthy of our love, or can all things really deserve love? Common sense will not, I fancy, be easily convinced of either of these propositions. Meanwhile others cry, a desire to please must be the master motive. This seems more plausible and is certainly more common; but we find a great modern artist quoting from Epictetus with approval: “If thou seekest to please, behold, thou art straightway fallen!” and I also must side with Epictetus and not with Mr. Robert Louis Stevenson and his many friends. Other some there are who cry, the desire to improve

others and one's-self. Now, although Ruskin has been much decried, this does appear a worthy motive ; the improvement is so obviously needed. Yet unfortunately there are a multitude of ways in which we could bear improving, and apparently little reason for preference of betterment by means of art. Have the great artists been those who most strenuously strove to improve others or even themselves ? Have they not rather shown a tendency to be contented by advancing art ? Lastly, what improvement is it that does result from art ? These questions, except the last, leave me utterly in the lurch ; but for that last I find an answer at the tip of my tongue : Beauty improves by educing elevation, delicacy, and refinement, and it also exhilarates ; and in Greece, and even once or twice since, you might have found whole companies that would have stared at you, if you had suggested that art had any other business than the discovery and revelation of the beautiful.

And now can we not reform this demand, that art should seek to improve, by saying, that art seeks to reveal beauty, and that contemplation of beauty exhilarates, refines, and elevates ? Reveal beauty ! that, then, is for the artist the sovereign command. Contemplate beauty ! obedience to that is for all men a prime assistance towards exhilaration, refinement, elevation ; and what do we more need ?

II

"The Battle of Arbela," by Altdorfer, "so captivated Napoleon, that it was carried off and hung in his bathroom at St. Cloud." This is testimony indeed to the power of painting !

But some will carp that they do not judge the mind of Napoleon to have been distinguished for delicacy, refinement, or elevation ; and though I would not take the judgment of such charitable souls for more than it is worth, yet perhaps one may admit that Napoleon was more noteworthy for the exhilaration that overflowed from him and which may still be received from the records of his life, than for delicacy, refinement, or elevation.

"The eye loses itself in a wilderness of landscape, valleys, plains, mountains, capes, and promontories, azure in the distance, with the sea beyond them and islands beyond that again, still

extending and expanding as if we gazed with Satan from the top of Niphates." This description is from the pen of Lord Lindsay: and I think it will not be denied that for him the picture had evoked elevated recollections; and perhaps even our charitable friends will not refuse some elevation to Napoleon akin to that in which Milton's conception of Satan may be said to be lofty. The man did tower; and this towering, exhilarating man was captivated by a picture: the subject of the picture helps to explain why. Here is Alexander in golden mail with all the chivalry of Macedon pricking closely behind, their lances in rest. Here is Darius turning to observe them from his massy car that rolls too slowly for escape; his charioteer lies dead across the splash-board at his feet; but from under the hoofs of his great foe's charger blood spurts up, while his lance strikes across a space of gloom wherein, if the eye searches, it discovers bodies of men and horses cumbering the ground. Farther off there are fortresses, ballistas, engines, towns, wharves, and ships, to convey yet more of alertness, effort, hazard, and purpose huge. And all is painted with the utmost delicacy of the camel-hair pencil, as though an insect had done it. A whole-hearted faith in the magnanimous splendour of the incident has harmonised the vast motives of landscape and war at their richest, and captivates the attention. Like the sudden sense of isolation and stillness, almost of silence, that may be borne in upon one who is in the heart of some surging uproar, so is the presence of beauty felt amid the overcharged excitement of this picture, where cloud and mountain, light and darkness, sea and land join in chorus. And this beauty, this stillness, this isolation is not the tragic crown of a great soul's effort, of dripping thorns and radiant suffering, it is a romantic, dreamlike charm unstrained by reality. This heaven of romance is perhaps oftener visited by the man of the world, and certainly of easier access, than the high heaven of aspiration and fortitude. Here the soul of Napoleon may well have entered to repose and recreate, and to enter here might be a benefit even for those who look and strive for better.

Gustave Flaubert in one of his letters tells us that a manservant of his who took snuff habitually murmured, as though to excuse himself, "*Napoléon prisait*" ("Napoleon took a pinch"); and he adds that, in effect, this common habit of theirs did establish a bond between them, which, without much degrading the great man,

greatly raised the rascal in his own esteem. To find ourselves admiring what so living and effective a man had admired, would be pleasant to many of us who might not care to contract all his minor habits. And to know that he was charmed by what we are invited to study may, and I think rightly should, lend us some additional eagerness and curiosity.

ALTDORFER'S LIFE

WHEN we ask where and how our artist lived, we are rewarded by few facts and many uncertainties. The place and date of his birth remain doubtful. In 1505 he was registered a burgher of Ratisbon, being described as "painter of Amberg, twenty-five years of age." His father may have been an Ulrich Altdorfer registered burgher in 1478; who may afterwards have removed to Amberg, in which case Albrecht could either have been born before his removal or after it.

An engraving (Bartsch VI. p. 416, No. 1), dated 1506, is by a brother Erhard, and is very like Albrecht's work of the same period; both may therefore have been 'prentices to their father, and both were already capable craftsmen. The manner in which their work is executed has been supposed to be developed from the Ratisbon illuminators of that date; and certain analogies must be admitted: however, it is a strikingly bold and advanced development by the year 1506; and as no links are extant, we may ascribe the honour of the progress to the problematic Ulrich or to the young men, his sons, or to Albrecht alone, whose after achievements yield some real purchase for thus prophesying backwards.

Erhard became court painter to Duke Henry of Mecklenburg, and several books published at Lübeck and Rostock contain woodcuts by him: other plates and cuts exist; but, separated from his brother, his work falls away to mediocrity.

In 1509 the Council of Ratisbon contributed ten gulden towards a picture by Albrecht for the choir of St. Peter's. In 1513 he bought a house with tower and courtyard in the Obere Bach Gasse, hard by the Austin Friary; this house still stands, though considerably modified. A second house in the Spiegelgasse was

bought in 1518, but he retained it only four years. In 1532 a third house was bought. This house has been less modified than that in the Obere Bach Gasse, and now bears an inscription: "Wohn und Sterbehaus des Malers und Baumeisters Albrecht Altdorfer geb. 1488, gestorben 1538." This house wherein he dwelt and died, No. A 169 Weitzel Strasse, is in comparison with Dürer's house what Ratisbon is to Nuremberg—more homely, less ornamented, and not so lofty. And "Little Albrecht's" work stands in something of the same relation to his great namesake's: nor can one help concluding, from the magnificence of Dürer's physical presence, that a like difference had held in regard to their persons. Yet as the smaller older city with its long bridge and lake-like affluence of waters where Danube and Regen meet, possesses a repose and charm all its own, so it is to Altdorfer we must turn for a sweetness of fancy, a homely pathos and romantic poetry of conception, which Dürer himself fails to yield.

Collector of goblets curiously chased or of fantastic forms, as we know him to have been, he must be regarded as "a rich man furnished with ability, living peaceably in his habitation"; industrious and of a consummate patience his work bespeaks him; and when we add to this his being fountain-head of a numerous school of artists, his having performed the functions of Baumeister and Councillor apparently to satisfaction ("very busy" in 1528, having been officially appointed to compose quarrels), and again find him studying Italian engravings and nielli, or in his will asseverating that, as he had embraced the Reformed faith, he neither "desired nor permitted" masses to be said for his soul, but instead bequeathed for the benefit of the needy poor in the public almshouse a goblet, "that one with the little foreign head," which had been his wedding gift to his wife—when we reflect on all this, shall we not conclude him to have been both of a capable and magnanimous nature? While a further study of his works will bring us to acknowledge, I believe, that his was a spirit winsome, delicate, and cordial beyond that of any other artist of his time or country.

All sunshine it would be natural to picture that man's life who so painted, did we not know it to have been passed in troublous and cruel times. Not only threatenings of Turkish invasion but civil conflicts were in the air. Luther, the Peasants' War, the League, Calvin,—heavy muttering thunderclouds beyond the horizon! He himself as Councillor signed a decree

for the expulsion of the Jews, whose synagogue had been burned by the fury of a mob, declaring that this severity was regarded as a just judgment of God. Nor did he scruple to take from their burial-ground a quantity of the gravestones for the pavement of his house. Such times, indeed, would of necessity be a perilous snare even for a soul gifted with rare delicacy ; however, Altdorfer made two etchings of this synagogue before its destruction, and has introduced it as a background more than once ; which may perhaps indicate a certain compunction, at least, for the vandalism of the deed.

Michael Ostendorfer, one of the school, cut a large wood block representing a temporary wooden church, which was erected on the site of the synagogue, that a preliminary pilgrimage might be organised with a view to providing funds for a new church to the Beautiful Mary. It shows us a large space in front of this timber building : in the midst is a gaudy statue of the Virgin set up on a pillar, around whose base seven or eight persons of both sexes, whom one might suppose from their attitudes to be drunk, are seen writhing as the little candles stuck on nails half-way up the pillar writhe in the sunlight.

The porch behind is covered with a multitude of offerings, hanks of rope, ladles, netting shuttles, cauldrons, sickles, pitch-forks, hay-rakes, the builder's square and plummet line, baskets, jack-boots, etc. etc. ; both inside and outside they are hung all about. A procession headed by huge cierges and a cardinal's hat on a pole encircles the whole building ; those in the procession carry other offerings or else candles, two men are naked save for scanty hair shirts. The cross keys of Regensburg wave over it all, and on the margin of the copy, which is now at Coburg, Dürer has written the following note and signed it : " 1523 this Spectre contrary to Holy Scripture has set itself up at Regensburg and has been dressed out by the Bishop. God help us that we should not so dishonour His precious mother but (honour her ?) in Christ Jesus. Amen." Did Altdorfer view this with similar feelings ? who can tell ? It may have been an object-lesson in priestcraft for him, and so have helped to change his convictions. As is also the case with Dürer, his art bears no witness to this change, but remains throughout of the old religion. We must not suppose his creed to have resembled that of Reformed Churches since. The superior man of those days shaped his own faith, and

it became him as an easy robe, and had nothing of the pinch of an uniform. Altdorfer and Dürer no doubt continued to ejaculate prayers to the Virgin as they had learned to do when little knaves; just as in their work pictures of her occur and reoccur quite naturally. The infection of hatred for the old faith, born of sedition, raged first among mobs who had been exploited by the Church, and it spread but slowly upward, impeded by family ties and good-breeding, and was only fixed there by persecutions on both sides. People in Altdorfer's position had not been convinced by an antagonist dogma, but freed politically and by means of Reason, who refreshed them, and whose children they were for a time more truly, perhaps, than ever before or than they have been since.

In treating sacred subjects, wherever a homely pathos does not carry him right to the heart of the incident, as in the chief scenes of his Fall and Redemption of Man, he lets his fancy play over and about his theme, as in the picture of the birth of Mary at Augsburg, where Anna has been installed in a cathedral, and has her bed set up in the ambulatory, circling round the pillars of which is a wreath of happy child-angels all holding hands and dancing in the air; three women attend to the needs of the newly-born and her mother. Joachim, who has just been out for provisions, returns in pilgrim's garb with a bundle slung from his staff across one shoulder. Renan has suggested that in the magnificent we have the first notes of the music to which the great cathedrals rose, a thought which may help some to find true propriety in this flight of Altdorfer's; which is fanciful, but with a fancy that brings the underlying sentiment suddenly to the surface instead of elaborately cloaking it. In such a winsome guise perchance the old Hebrew had heard wisdom proceed out of the lips of a babe, when wise heads had been in a brown study to no purpose; for the quaint and dreamlike notion of a child made them all at once aware of what was natural and right. Such legends indeed natively belong to the people and should always be clothed in their racy folk-fancies.

But to return to our arid facts: of the Christian name of Altdorfer's wife, "Anna," we are informed from a deed of purchase by which he bought the house in the Spiegelgasse; she is also mentioned in the like document concerning his first house, so it has been supposed that she may have brought him considerable means.

In 1526 he was elected to the Inner Council, and became one of the city architects. He built the market Thurm, now vanished, but which till recently held its place, the youngest of a company of brother-towers that watch over Ratisbon, the eldest dating from the time of the Romans. The Neue Kirke is supposed to have been begun on his designs; but probably, funds falling short, it was modified, and can now scarcely be held to represent his intentions. He added two bastions and other works to the walls of the town, but these also have been swept away; still standing, however, is a public Meat and Slaughter House which he built.

In 1528 they wanted to make him "Cammerer" for the quarter of St. Emmerams. Altdorfer made urgent entreaty to be excused, on the ground that he had undertaken to finish a large work (The Battle of Arbela) for Duke William of Bavaria, and had promised to deliver the same in a short time. "Much against their wills," the chronicler Gumpelzhaimer tells us, "they exempted him from accepting the honourable position to which they had appointed him."

On the 27th of July 1532 his wife died, and perhaps in order to shun the emptiness of his home he then bought the house in the Weitzel Strasse.

Mr. Bell Scott has supposed that he added to his numerous avocations that of paper-miller, because of a water-mark discovered in the paper of one of his prints, while other Ratisbon prints are on imported paper, but it is only the duplication of the letter A in the mark that has made him suppose it was milled at Ratisbon and by Albrecht Altdorfer.

In 1534 he was made the Warden of the Austin Friary. In 1537 he bought a fourth house, outside the walls, with a large garden and situated on a canal, to serve as a summer retreat. In 1538 he made his will; his principal heirs were Erhard and two sisters, Magdalena and Aurelia, both married. Beside his collection of silver goblets, the inventory mentions nineteen books, some pictures, rings, weapons, chests, scales, coins, twenty Eimer of Bavarian wine, and a horse with trappings.

There are two portraits: one asserts that it presents him to our eyes, and it is open to us to suppose that the other may do so. The first, a small engraving, at least a century later in date, not only bears his name beneath, but copies his signature on the background; however, the style of dress and cut of beard and hair give

it the lie by upwards of fifty years. There may have been none the less some miniature or drawing after which it was made, by an engraver whose hand was freer in dealing with history than with his burin. Impressions may be seen in the Print Room at Paris and in the Libraries at Munich and Vienna.

The second represents quite a different individual in authentic costume, and is either the work of the painter himself or done in his workshop. Here certainty ends ; for this goodly burgher of rather a Jewish cast of features heads a procession invented, by way of adulation, for Maximilian, which is painted on about four hundred strips of parchment from two feet to a yard in length and about a foot in breadth ; of these, one hundred and eighty-eight are in the Imperial Library at Vienna, the rest are lost. The derivation of this labour of loyalty from Altdorfer's workshop, which has been made by Dr. Dörnhöffer, and the attribution of considerable portions to the very hand of that artist, cannot be doubted. Many of the pictures carried on poles and representing victories which never occurred, mingle motives of landscape and seascape with the countless spears of plumed and gilded chivalry in the same spirit and prodigality as *The Battle of Arbela*, and being less laboured as a rule, yield a better insight into the Turneresque audacity and deftness of handling which such subjects could call forth from the enthusiasm of our artist. But that we have here a portrait of Altdorfer is too doubtful a supposition to draw from this, and the fact that the function of the worthy and his companion at the head of the procession remains unexplained, unless we explain it by supposing them severally to be the artist and the author of the verbal description which also still exists.

This procession, unfinished and so probably never presented, is the chief evidence that remains of Altdorfer's dealings with the Court and Emperor. There are, besides, the marginal drawings in pink, violet, or green ink on ten out of thirty-five leaves of the Emperor's Prayer-Book now at Besançon ; the major portion of the book, on which Dürer and Cranach worked, is in the Library at Munich ; but, with the exception of a few missing leaves, the rest is at Besançon, and contains, besides those by Altdorfer, margins by Baldung Grün, Hans Dürer, and Jorg Breu of Augsburg. For his commerce with the highest dignitary of art there is only Heller's statement, that at Nuremberg, the print-dealer Frauenholz's

collection, in 1822, contained a red chalk drawing of an old man by Albrecht Dürer, bearing an inscription stating that it was presented by him to Altdorfer at Ratisbon in 1509. He has copied the lion out of Dürer's St. Jerome into one of his margins for the Prayer-Book. Other motives are taken from Burgkmair and Hans Dürer. It has been suggested, also, that a panel described by the inventory as painted by Albrecht *Ihrer* should be read Dürer. Of course legend and tradition have had their way, and Dürer has been honoured with the pupil who best could honour him, yet though a small copy of a plate by Dürer, B. 24, is ascribed to Altdorfer, their having been namesakes is the better basis for the rumour.

In 1538 he not only made his will but finished a picture of Christ taking leave of His mother. This work is now lost; indeed, of twenty-five pictures said to have been in his native city in 1819, only one of doubtful authenticity now remains. That this subject, which is also that of one of the happiest woodcuts in *The Fall and Redemption of Man*, should have been the last he treated, may please those who hunger for symbolical significance in the events that perplex us. Altdorfer could have been but little more than fifty, and still enjoyed unimpaired powers.

On the 12th or 14th of February he died, and was laid beside his wife in the Augustinian Church, which now serves as lumbershed to a barracks. Most of the inscribed flagstones have been removed, but a few are leant against the south wall. A piece of one was discovered when the church was dismantled, bearing the words Albrecht Altdorffer Paum. . . . Soldiers tramp through to their parade-ground on which the chancel gives, or a bevy of noisy children wake up the echoes of the vaulted roof and enliven dusty gloom, on which tall dirty windows look down, many of them broken and in part boarded up. A desolate, desecrated place!

Almost as vacant as this shell of a church are the records of that man's life before whose felicitous picture of Alexander the Great the great Napoleon may on many a morning have stood refreshed from his bath, naked as Achilles, and mused unconscious in a return of boyish reverie, smiling at beauty, valour, and magnificence because they pleased him, quit of the cost and care as his olive Corsican limbs were quit of the stiff and gaudy uniform—healthy and at ease.

TRADITION

ART historians are in the habit of speaking of "tradition." What is meant by this word when used in reference to the history of art? I think that to answer this question will help to an understanding of Altdorfer's relation to the art of Germany and the world.

At the outset art and craft are one and the same thing. The work is so difficult to do, that nobody dreams but what it is to be done as well as possible. Genius has been described as the capacity for taking pains; not a complete description, but true as far as it goes, and in early epochs it thus, most probably, revealed itself. The man that had imagined the thing to be done in its perfection, so vividly that he loved, ensued it, and forgot it never; to him improvised tools and obdurate substances yielded at last all they could possibly yield. There stood shield, helmet, bowl, or flagon such as had never been seen before. How had he done it? Did he not smile as Dürer once smiled, presenting to an admirer that ordinary camel-hair brush with which had been painted such wonderful hair? Yes; but could he feel surely able to do it again? He must try: tremblingly he did try, and at last knew how to do it by heart.

The boy that watched, breathed hard at his elbow, and stayed away from play; with what pains he would teach him if only he might teach him all before death came!

Doubtless even these first love-chosen apprentices would not learn all; something was lost, something that gave a stamp to the work, made it in a dim way different, personal, old-fashioned. Yet the 'prentices did advance; if not the first, his successor: though always the man who made the stride left something impressed on his work which was not carried on, but its place was

now left blank, now taken up by a new character, according as his 'prentice was craftsman or artist. Still, the main achievement was not lost, for both alike learned the method by rote, treasured their master's tools, made others as like them as they could, or furtively tried to improve on them.

The effort and attention necessary that one may conform to a not fully grasped method of employing difficult substances results in an economy of energy which can spare little or nothing for the realisation of caprices, and which, like duty become habit, does not "feel the weight of chance desires." Yet it would be a mistake to suppose that art traditions work directly to the discovery of beauty. They do not. In proportion to the authority they have acquired, they test the strength of conviction behind every departure from routine, but every advance is such a departure. At the same time traditions imply qualities of orderliness, cleanliness, definite purpose, and the absence of waste, which all enhance the presence and splendour of beauty and help to make it effective. Yet beauty, in art, is always the discovery or creation of an artist—an artist whose integrity, however, has only tradition for defence against the promptings to innovation that are born of caprice; though he may at times be rendered by the same tradition, in this case a hindrance, unresponsive to such promptings when quickened by the contemplation of beauty and free from mere wilfulness.

In early periods art is commissioned, responds to an exterior demand; therefore the craftsman can have no advantage over the artist, but must remain always obviously his inferior. And yet well-nigh from the commencement the penury of half-developed souls must have created a demand for the makeshift—for a class of articles designed to no more than barely serve their purpose. This canker would grow up, the offspring of the spiritually poor who were not poor in spirit—of the man who did inferior work unabashed, and of the man who pretended, and hoped to buy off the future.

Bad art as distinguished from merely inefficient art is the result of a tacit compact between the artist and his public, a compact degrading to both. In the same way good art presumes on the existence of a demand for what is noble and faultless in elevated souls. But the opposition of these two spirits of work can never become acute while the tradition is still binding.

When tools have been rendered efficient and the shortest

and best method of subjugating the obdurate materials has been so firmly grasped as to be an item not difficult for the born artist to learn; exhilarated by the ease of his power, this last triumphs, revels, uses his skill as a poet uses language, breaks down all the old restrictions, attempts the impossible well-nigh with success: so easy is it for this Homer who really begins where his forerunner left off; for this Titian who, still a youth, surpasses his aged and laborious master. Besides the inheritance of an almost perfected practice, he lives in an age that has woken up and come out of doors, nay, has travelled farther than men had heretofore; every young man about him has received, in good time, more or less of an effective secret from his father or his father's friend. Things no one had dreamed of appear all at a rush within reach. The epoch expects Shakespeare, and is not surprised at his success.

In Greece and in the Italy of the Renaissance many isolated traditions arrived at ripeness all in a heat. Changed conditions enable them to communicate with a fulness and ease till then out of the question, and what do we see—the work of Phidias, the work of Titian! This new lord of the air has not added to the trade secrets; he has been too much in advance to teach, too occupied with discovery and with novelty. He has done what only he could do—what only such as he are right to attempt; he has very likely done more than can be done soundly—more than even he was right to attempt. Who is to judge him? who is to follow? such another man will not occur for generations! All is at sixes and sevens! The tradition is lost!

Here comes a gifted man having half learned a method gleaned between whiles in his haste to produce—gleaned from pupils of that great master who were chosen not because they could, but because they would, and paid—gleaned hypothetically from those glorious, intoxicating masterpieces themselves. Such an one makes his pictures speak, they are poems; but not with the grand assurance and serenity of him who had inherited the tradition. Anon there comes a conscientious, diligent man who well-nigh refinds the tradition with a lifetime of pains, but who has nothing to say and no one to say it to, that can for a moment be compared to the subject-matter and audience of the grand master, who lived in that stirring, not this somnolent age.

So art becomes the affair of the unsupported, isolated individual who speaks to a sect, a clique; or if, by reason of strength, to the

world, speaks in a half-learned language, on subjects of which the real nature has been disguised by inferior attempts and received ideas, as Goethe complained he had to : till, alas ! he must correct and withstand as well as create.

Then tradition is that which keeps in mind the best and most direct method of employing the means at hand. The means, the materials, the men, vary with the conditions ; but a best and most direct method there must always be, either known or to be found. This best way, when it has been laboriously found by experience, is endangered and lost by new aims, not native to the conditions, being entertained, and by such special endowments being relied on, through the example of some exceptional man, that they cannot recur with sufficient frequency to prevent a practice based on the presumption of their presence from falling into decay and oblivion.

Where then is Altdorfer's place in regard to this sequence ? was he born in the spring, summer, autumn, or winter of an art tradition ? Germany at the close of the fifteenth century presented a closer analogy than it had ever done before, or has done since, to the grand art periods of Greece and Italy. Many traditions were approaching ripeness in different centres. Altdorfer is the great artist of one of these. At Ratisbon none before him, none after him, can be called his rivals. Yet he did not break down the tradition by the force of a stupendous personality, he was not a Michael Angelo. No, he appears, like a happy child that has climbed a rock, smiling with success yet trembling ; for a moment he yearns towards display, but not as Dürer did, to yield : though he grew sufficiently at ease, he remained too modest, and died, it seems, unspoiled.

GERMAN TRADITION

EVERY art tradition has been nursed by the traditions of some race, traditions whose effectiveness consists in that they foster its characteristic virtues.

In modern times the atmosphere maintained by racial traditions has become, as a rule, almost entirely engrossed by the mere machinery of society. The lungs that are wholly given only to sustain the actual state of things have become altogether too numerous. The world of men was never before upheld at such a vast expense of energy—never before has mere existence been so guarded, so respected and cherished by mankind. Not the fulness of life but the bare fact of it is regarded with a well-nigh superstitious reverence. That noble point of view, which estimates life as worth little in comparison with the virtues it may be expended on, is always being overshadowed not only by the greed of the materialist but by the fondness of socialism and philanthropy.

While no one asks for beauty none will be found, but to those who knock with importunity, the gate of her garden never remains fast closed. Effort should be led aside from the mere mill-work of material production and directed towards the true goal of humanity, virtue, and beauty. It is because the traditions of life in early ages did this that there then were living art traditions and not merely isolated artists.

Among those who desire æsthetic advance, the arch enemy of progress is the pretension that Beauty has been found in this or that popular resort, where people plume themselves on being her friends, or her guests, who have never even dreamed of air so bracing as is that which she must breathe or languish.

Great need then is ours to plunge back into the past, and refresh ourselves with contemplation of conditions that allowed art a national or at least urban importance.

At Ratisbon, against the north-east corner of the north transept of the old church, stands the famous Esel Tower, which is no staircase, but wherein a road winds slowly to the level of the roof; such was the characteristic expedient of the early builders for getting their material up to the desired height—very circuitous, very ponderous, but very sure! It was a multitude of asses that did this work; almost in the dark, in loose, damp earth, their trains trudged painfully up or trotted and stumbled down—a symbol, we may please ourselves with fancying, of that old German empire which, though apparently the most incoherent of feudal systems, yet got to the top in the days of Maximilian, when it enacted a law which has proved to be the basis of the law of nations, and moulds the world to-day, and which then enabled it to become the last European empire save that short summer of Napoleon's glory.

It was not the nobles or the Church which effected this, it was the cities, and they did it in spite of the nobles and the Church, as they also effected their more boasted Reformation.

“From the time that Henry the Fifth admitted their artisans to the privileges of free burghers, they became more and more prosperous; while the steadiness and frugality of the German character compensated for some disadvantages arising out of their inland situation.” So says Hallam: and let us realise what it meant to be lost in the central laps of a mighty land. Our English stock, as islanders, have become the men of accident, of a crisis. We depend on chance, and no other race is perhaps so to be relied on to take advantage of the turn of the tide, or of flotsam, jetsam, and lag end after a storm. We boast that we are lords of the sea, but we have rather been its scholars, and as such almost bound to neglect any elaborate foresight, but, on the other hand, to be ready for emergency. Our representative men have hung on happy moments; they have not, in general, laboriously learned to achieve, but been equipped with ability to make the most of what turned up.

“We know how long the outlaws of Sherwood lived in tradition — men who, like some of their betters, have been

permitted to redeem by a few acts of generosity the just ignominy of extensive crimes. These, indeed, were the heroes of vulgar applause; but when such a judge as Sir John Fortescue could exult that more Englishmen were hanged for robbery in one year than French in seven, and that 'if an Englishman be poor, and see another having riches which may be taken from him by might, he will not spare to do so,' it may be perceived how thoroughly these sentiments had pervaded the public mind."

It should perchance nettle us, when we notice how this view of what were our leading sentiments in 1463 agrees with that current on the Continent of what they still are as a nation if no longer as individuals. Not only the foreign journals but calmer judges contrast our philanthropy, always most to the fore where least called for and farthest from home, with our commercial close-fistedness and imperial greed. However, the words quoted above are the mature sentence of an unimpeachable English gentleman, a severer judge than Sir John Fortescue, but one who, we may hope, is also representative of something extant in the national character.

A faith in the ordeal of strength, distrust of elaborate precaution, the union of a lion-like indolence with a rapidly calculated and successful daring, are just the characters to look for in men who have indeed had the winds and waves, with their long sleeps and reckless violence, for nursing mothers and nursing fathers.

Our art astonishes, by the suddenness of its developments and the desultoriness and lack of method with which it has been in general pursued. We have had our Elizabethan drama, and minor burst of foison, but what we have had always with us is singularly aimless and somnolent.

But to an inland continental people nothing comes; what they want, they must go and fetch. They cannot indolently ride across the waves; and if they may, at times, glide down some majestic river, all the labour of tow-path and lock must be resorted to in order to reascend, not to mention mail and blackmail by the way. It is such things that form the temper of a race; that school foresight, industry, and application.

The constitution of the imperial cities or those of the Hanseatic League is evolved as by the science of bees. It is the workers

who really govern; and they have constantly to kill off the drones and repair loss from foreign pillage; but, with a marvellous fidelity to instinct, they succeed. There is not the invigorating response to inspiring ideas that makes the glory of French history; there is not the adventurous assumption of responsibility, and reliance on the gifts of nature and fortune, that distinguishes English achievements: they seem to coagulate; and if their work is broken up or falls in, they begin again with a wonderful patience, but apparently born more of instinct than of hope. They conceive perfection, it would seem, first as sound units; the harmony of the whole can wait; and this conception belongs to the unit, and preserves the whole from corruption and overweening, however incoherent it remain. Their history has the pathos of those long trains of asses winding up and down that dark tower, with its infrequent windows and its too short rests at the top, where one is overtired for enjoyment of the prospect.

But let us return to our historian. "Spire, Nuremberg, Ratisbon, and Augsburg were not, indeed, like the rich markets of London and Bruges, nor could their burghers rival the princely merchants of Italy; but they enjoyed the blessings of competence diffused over a large class of industrious freemen, and in the fifteenth century one of the politest of Italians could extol their splendid and well-furnished dwellings, their rich apparel, their easy affluent mode of living, the security of their rights and just equality of their laws." And we learn from a footnote that this polite Italian was Ænias Sylvius, who in his treatise—*De Moribus Germanorum*—declared that the kings of Scotland would rejoice to be so well lodged as the second-class citizens at Nuremberg. Better furnished! the Museums of Munich and Nuremberg attest it. "Skipton Castle, the great honour of the Earls of Cumberland, and among the most splendid mansions of the north," had only seven or eight beds in 1572; no chairs, looking-glasses, or carpets: but Altdorfer thirty years earlier had all he needed of these and a house in the country to boot.

The houses of Nuremberg and Ratisbon tell their own tale. The richer their inhabitants the taller they grew, and many seem even to have swollen in their upper storeys. Under the immense sloping roof was the storeroom or warehouse, in the chambers beneath lived the family, the counting-houses and workshops came

next, and last the retail shop, coach-house, or stable, giving on to the street. Immediately beneath the gable protrudes a crane, often a fixture, with its own little pent-house reaching on struts half across the street, to protect the pulley wheel, over which there still hangs, in many cases, rope's end and iron hook. The whole front of a flour or forage merchant's would be whitened or bearded by the constant hoisting and lowering of sacks or trusses. On a street disturbance the upper storeys could be shut off from the more public offices below, and safest of all would be the hoard under the tall roof.

A small wooden skeleton model of such a house may very possibly have been constructed by Altdorfer on his way to become architect; all who were registered master builders had first to submit such a model to the Guild, and a collection of them is still on view in the Rath-house, though it includes none attributed to him.

It was this burgher affluence that commissioned and inspired the art which, at Ratisbon, culminates in the work of the "Little Albrecht," as the French have styled him by contrast with the great Dürer. Every such local German school in truth resembled a caddis-worm, building its house, choosing the little bright stones in the sand, or catching a stray shred of silk or wool borne past by the stream. So we may picture it to have worked—very industrious, very homely, very snug—always in the main bent on shielding its too soft body, but often chuckling to think how fine, how enviable a house it had made. And then follows the pathos of the result. A May-fly, that lives but a day, falls and is no more. A few works of the great lonely Dürer tower up toward the sun as on dragon wings, and Holbein seems to pause and sail in the warmth and light; there is, beside, the happy shimmering innocence of Altdorfer, and the gnat-like dance of a lewd and elegant Cranach, but that is all. Thus, too, it fared with German poetry, a great lonely Goethe, a Schiller, a Heine, and a crowd of May-flies. The integrity of the race endures, and still lends aspirants the fostering strength of its virtues, prudence, industry, and application; but fortune has been blind to their great deserving; the graces that are taught by success, the felicities of genius, of these they have been stinted indeed. Yet are they not on the eve of acquiring them? Their newly-won coherence is becoming stable; and if the contagion of foreign ideals, which they can never make their

own, is stayed, if they trust in their own vision, and believe that beauty, not force nor knowledge, still less display or the desire to astonish, is the proper aim of art, what artists may they not make! Then will they seek Altdorfer and learn of his happy spirit to abandon theory and follow loveliness.

ALTDORFER'S ART

WHAT objects served as models for this art? Architecture, gardens, bonny children, fine clothes and goldsmiths' work—as in Italy, as in Flanders, so in Germany, these were the chief plastic motives of the painting that culminated in the glories of the Renaissance. Landscape and the life of country folk were added as proficiency was approached. Religion furnished the subject-matter, classical mythology supplying her part as time went on.

Architecture—the splendid apogee of this was over before those conditions obtained which created the art of which we speak; at least this was so north of the Alps, where, already softened by time, and shut back into an age of gold by newer, less successful, buildings, the Gothic masterpieces remained the most appropriate of backgrounds for every really graceful or elevated imagination. Gothic had a tendency always to run up into an ecstasy of aspiration, becoming unreal and over slender, over rich, in the degeneracy with which it everywhere sickened when once the axe had been laid to the root by the English wars in France.

On German soil a pure and sound Gothic had never existed; but for this reason the separation between the best and what followed is less marked. Altdorfer was an architect, and a fondness for the backgrounds which architecture supplied is characteristic of him; while the German tendency to over-dream in architecture, which had existed even in the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries, is peculiarly his. Gothic melts with him into newer styles, and these again into styles that are pure fantasies. He plays with it. Van Eyck feels the authority of aisles and

choirs, even though he knew them only in overwrought Flemish examples. Dürer reports gravely what he saw, and has no fondness for the pointed, but rather is haunted by the round arches and less imaginative if more reasoned architecture he had seen in Italy. Holbein is only at home in Renaissance buildings. Altdorfer, who lived close to one of the purest of German churches, loves it; but as an amateur who brings some foreign vase into his own world, setting it beside other treasures, half puzzled, half amused by the contrasts or affinities revealed.

Gardens are no more for him the prim plots and walks of the early painters: he loves that the wilderness be admitted, and encircles with weeds the highly-groomed flowers of horticulture, and makes the elegant exotic rear its head from among the grasses of the fields.

Children are treasure-trove, and more often than not have cherub wings in the works of this apparently childless husband; they are happy and busy, not merely quaint, stolid, or occupied, like those of Dürer. Angels had always been less solemn north of the Alps, more fairy-like, or even good-humouredly impish; popular imagination had given them first rainbow-hued wings, then every kind of elaborate musical instrument, and at last, loving to consider them as ministers, it represents them performing offices which would have been below the dignity of Italian angels; as in Dürer's early picture at Dresden, where the cherubs sweep the floor and water it, and show themselves the most willing little menials. Since grown-up people, or even grown girls, are less likely to do such things gracefully, with a spontaneous freedom from every hint of the mere performance of duty, it is an exquisite justness that lights in the end on little children, for whom the whole business is really play. And this tendency perhaps finds in Altdorfer its most adequate expression. There is a ladder in the Nativity at Bremen up which and along a rafter the little winged knaves bustle to fetch hay and straw to make a bed for the Child and its Mother. One has just fallen off, and lies, his useless wings beneath him, on top of a bundle of straw, while another runs to his aid with the most comical expression of grieved concern. The resourceful invention of Sandro Botticelli has shown us baby fauns and sylvans playing with the armour of sleeping Mars, but in the

Museum of Nuremberg is a statuette cast in iron of a mailed cherub which makes "arms ridiculous" in quite a new sense, with an eloquence almost as winsome and irresistible as that "Consider the lilies of the field," which smiled worldliness out of countenance fifteen hundred years before. And it is this naïveté of practical wisdom, so different from the grave Florentine's most playful conceit, which distinguishes German humour when it is felicitous, such as that in which Altdorfer delighted, and such as Wagner has rediscovered with the childlike gaiety of his wise Hans Sachs.

Fine clothes and goldsmiths' work—in treating these, he is in the same way more at home than even artists like Van Eyck and Dürer, more Venetian one might say, assorting the wardrobes of queens and shepherdesses, of beggars and princes, and with an invention worthy of Hans Andersen summing up the sense of this contrast so often productive of beauty, by representing Poverty as a beggar family swept along on the trains of a noble lord and dame as on a magic carpet, to the contentment apparently both of those who draw and those who are drawn.

If he dwells delightedly on gay brocades and feathered hats, it is still more because of the confident, hopeful air of such things, or because his dexterity with camel-hair and sable brushes made them such refreshing exercises, than because he was a rich man with probably some superstition in regard to expense.

His landscapes nearly always convey the luminous freshness of a moist atmosphere. Though his dramatic intuition dictates a sunset, he always imposes at the same time a sense of the advent of night, and one feels that dew is forming in the shadows, every green thing is breathing once more, and the suffering and pain depicted will soon be relieved by tears and the invasion of that great stillness. In *The Battle of Arbela* it is surely a sunrise, not a sunset. The crescent moon is waning and fading over Darius, but over Alexander the sun mounts marvellous with glory.

It is true that this happy optimism has deep resources of pathos, as in the *Flagellation of The Fall and Redemption of Man*, or the copperplate of the Virgin peering through the temple cloisters at her lost twelve-year-old disputing among the doctors. In this

last, with a gesture that brings the heart into the mouth, he seems to anticipate Rembrandt. And I have heard a distinguished artist remark what a welcome treasure the woodcuts of The Fall and Redemption of Man must have been to the giant Dutchman, who has treated the same noble theme with more dramatic power and intimate emotion than it has evoked in any other soul.

PAINTINGS

THE paintings by Altdorfer divide themselves into two classes—

A class on which no pains has been spared, which are in their own way as accomplished as the work of Van Eyck or Dürer; and a class of works which, however interesting the design may be, are more or less coarsely and carelessly carried out.

It is also remarkable that, while the dewy aerial colour makes one of the chief charms of the first class, heavy opaque or crudely harsh tones are the rule and not the exception in the second.

As there is no division between the dates of the two classes, it seems natural to conclude that the latter are commercial pictures, executed in the workshop but not entirely by the hand of the master; and even where his hand must certainly be recognised, it was no doubt a foregone conclusion that he would not expend more than a certain measure of care over such works.

The first class is of course the most important, and I think fully justifies the mention of Van Eyck's name. Not that I for a moment want to pretend that Altdorfer can rank with this great and august painter of little pictures; there is a harmony, dignity, and restraint in the works of the great Flemish artist which the playful, whimsical Bavarian never rises to. But much has been ignorantly written about Altdorfer's technical insufficiency, in English as well as in other tongues. Now this technical inferiority never existed save in the imaginations of the uninformed. A scarcely more wonderful skill goes to the use of pigment in the pictures of the great Van Eyck than is shown in such pictures as *Susanna at the Bath*, the *Flight into Egypt*, or the little *St. George*. There is even in the two latter instances an imaginative invention of handling to which Van Eyck presents no parallel. Dürer certainly did not paint so well, had less intuition

in the treatment of pigment. If he rises far above Altdorfer, it is by that high seriousness of conception and that impeccable mastery of drawing wherein he has no rival, not in the handling of pigment or the wedding of colours. No doubt the master of Ratisbon had never studied the human form profoundly; but then he never treated it but as a secondary motive. And is not the great Albrecht a child in the treatment of aerial colour and perspective compared with his little namesake? Perhaps no gift of Altdorfer's is so unique as Dürer's control over his wrist, yet not only has he first-rate gifts, but he has a marvellous proficiency, and needs no pity when compared with the little masters with whom he has been ignorantly classed, and not one of whom can for a moment hold a candle to his achievement.

One or two of his engravings show that he was not out of all danger from the decadence in taste and power which holds them. A hint of later unhappy developments of painting may be traced perhaps in the "Wealth and Poverty," the latest in date of the pictures remaining to us, which shows, besides a tendency, already noticeable in the lace-like sky of the Susanna, to an over-elaboration, a finicky delicacy; besides this, it shows that the sense of mass and proportion in the composition as a whole has loosened. However, to mention this is probably to overstate its importance. The "Wealth and Poverty" would most likely seem quite as exceptional, could we recover other works of those last years, as it now does.

His is, beyond the shadow of a doubt, the third name in German art; and the distance between him and Cranach, not to mention any lesser name, is more considerable than that which separates him from Dürer and Holbein. For variety of gifts and resource, he stands alone; and when one considers the poetry with which his works are instinct, it is not fanciful to style him the Giorgione of the North, a Giorgione, alas! little loved and nigh forgotten, but whom, now that the carefulness of science has begun to leaven the treatment of historical art criticism, his countrymen commence to appreciate as with a balance, though their eyes and hearts had failed to recognise and love.

A picture once in the Vienna Gallery, now said to be lost, is described as a pure landscape. By an inferior hand a picture which is a pure landscape hangs as pair to the little St. George at Munich, which last itself consists almost entirely of the foliage of

trees. There is besides a moon-lit landscape behind the saintly persons in one of the pictures at Siena. Dürer had made studies in water-colours after nature, drawings of localities and buildings, and his etching of the Cannon is practically a landscape. Nevertheless Altdorfer is originator, north of the Alps, of landscape as a branch of painting, the rival of others. Backgrounds such as that beneath The Coronation of the Virgin, or the wood in the St. George, or the grey Danube broadly sweeping through the dark wooden piers of a temporary bridge as in the other St. Quirinus picture at Siena, or the same river rounding the hills in that at Nuremberg, when the willow wood shudders at sundown, or the dawn at peep behind the ruins and skeleton bushes of the Nativity at Bremen; such backgrounds are as novel, as genuine, as refreshing, as those divine two among the frescoes by Titian at Padua. To take a short-lived effect of light, to treat water because it was water, trees because they are trees, directly aiming at their most individual beauties, this was to open new ground, and this Altdorfer does. He does more; for there are some dozen landscapes etched in outline of great delicacy which show a tendency to the conventional and balanced compositions that have since lost all novelty, though here they are joined to a curiosity and resource that can never age. The set at Vienna has been coloured by hand—Dr. Dörnhöffer would like to think by the artist himself; in any case, they are but little advanced by it towards giving that satisfaction that we look for from his works.

Shallow water loiters under the brick arches that support a mill or warehouse, and out of it frightened women lift the slender body of the youthful St. Florian. A baby angel swims in the basin of The Fountain at Berlin; and one of two angels almost out of their teens holds both hands under the spouts of that in the engraving of the same name; the holy travellers are forgotten in silent joy to feel the cold water flow. Moss streams from ruins and from the branches of trees whose gracious swaying makes beautiful vast spaces of sky. His buildings, his fountains, though the most treacherous ground for his imagination, are often retrieved by the way they are knit up with out-of-doors or by homely figures reclaimed for the realm of use and wont. Little more can be attempted than to give some notion of the radical love of beauty which is revealed by his choice of motives. The pictures must be

seen. The Susanna must be peered into, with its amazing fore-ground, where monkshood, hollyhocks, poppy, buttercup, cowslip, ragged-robin, yellow snap-dragon, clover, violets, forget-me-not, and bluebells spring up, together with the grass, and its wonderful snail-shell, and, farther off, the little table with a box and two dice on it.

DRAWINGS

IN his drawings Altdorfer is probably most fortunate in his medium, most alive to what it requires of him. He approaches paper with reverence; far from regarding it as so much space, whereon to disgorge crude fancies or cruder observation, but as a thing already endowed with fine qualities which should be respected—and whence Beauty calls to him, as she is said to have cried to Michael Angelo from her prison in the block. He must liberate and enhance; if there is creation, the paper, paint-brush, subject dictated to him; he was little more than their servant: even his own hand taught him more than he could have divined. Herein his are in striking contrast to Albert Dürer's drawings in the same mediums.

He tints his sheets amber, green, brown, pale and dull blue, or grey. The line he employs is curved and rapid, though not so curved as that of Dürer, and with a wilfulness very different from his assured composure. Foliage is transformed: becomes fan-like, seaweed-like, feathered, plumed, to respond to the exigencies of the crisp, swift, tapered, or taloned stroke. Sometimes a similar transformation overtakes drapery, at other times the suppleness of the quill-point leads him into a loving finish, that not even a sixteenth-century pinking of finery can over-weary. In rapid sketches, roofs and walls take a mountain or wave-like curve, and when he is at leisure pebble after pebble will be rounded and perfected as though by the sedulous water's caress.

No. 83 in the Print Room at Berlin is a drawing on dull-blue paper both in black and white line. It represents a forest. At the foot of the larches lies a young man with all the appearance of wealth and fashion,—he is dead, his curly hair is straggled on the moss, his upturned face is juvenile; on the right hand is

a ruin with mouldering arches of stone leading inwards through unfathomable gloom, over them the rapacious verdure has climbed and towers aloft. Hither comes a bird, sings, and flits off once more; here is the dew exhaled, and the magical undertones of the forest are prolonged through their eternal symphony, but always the blood stiffens in the clothes it has sopped, and cold takes possession of the body that was once Prince Pyramus, as Altdorfer may well have intended that we should know.

No. 3 in the same collection, on umber paper, is also perfect. It represents the Agony in the Garden. In the immediate foreground lie the sleeping apostles. Jesus kneels above them on the right, and again on either side of the picture trees tower up. In the middle distance is a cliff, on the brow of which sits the angel holding the emptied cup, and with eyes riveted by the gaze of Christ; at the foot of the cliff and immediately beneath the angel approaches the traitor with the high priest's servants, unseen, unheard of Him they come to take, who gazes constantly over their heads. The whole scene is bathed in a sad dignity as by a hidden moon. These two drawings are not less admirable as poetical inventions and for dramatic propriety than they are for exquisite delicacy of workmanship.

There are at Berlin other drawings of great beauty—thirteen in all. I might mention No. 113, an Adoration of the Magi, in perfect preservation, which is, alas! too rarely the case. The workmanship is rather over-caligraphic, though the foreground—pebbles, etc.—is worthy of notice for the way in which the treatment is adapted to the objects. No. 93, a hunting scene, in which the horses recall Pisanello. And on rougher paper, a landscape representing a water-mill shows an admirable variation of treatment to meet new conditions.

In the Albertina at Vienna are eleven drawings ascribed to him, but many of very doubtful attribution. No. 43, Vol. I. A.A., a Sacrifice of Abraham, is, however, first-rate, though somewhat damaged; the paper may have been cut down, as the drawing appears to have continued beyond it.

At Munich there are three important drawings in the Print Room, and one in the Library.

Brunswick has two, one a most interesting design representing Curtius leaping into the abyss. The dark-olive paper seems to suggest a night scene, as does also the empty street. The gulf

has opened at the foot of a ruined Gothic porch ; and, magnificently plumed, the hero on horseback leaps into it. If conscious, the poetry that insists on the loneliness which must be the real condition of every heroic action, however crowded the actual scene, is remarkable ; and can one doubt its being conscious, so many unmistakable instances of real imagination as are found in our artist's work ?

A drawing in the possession of Ritter von Lanna, originally from Dr. Lippmann's collection, dated 1509, the Judgment of Paris ; rather rubbed, on red paper ; black lines faint, and white blurred ; is a most important work. The head of Paris, who lies in a trance, is turned away from the three goddesses, while Hermes in the furred robe of a Faust or Paracelsus stands over him. The three fair rivals, otherwise naked, wear the grand feathered hats which are so dear to this artist, and lend themselves so admirably to his workmanship, and in the mid-distance on the right, with surely not an accidental symbolism, a little figure crosses an arched wooden bridge : the usual great feathered firs and larches wave their boughs against the expanse of sky above, while, at the foot of an elaborate monument which rises like a fountain in the centre mid-distance, the Prince of Troy's charger attends ready to bear him away to his fate.

ENGRAVINGS

IN his engraved work, also, Altdorfer is truly original; he is eminently the scholar of burin and knife, and more concerned about what should be done than what it was usual to do. There is no sign of an effort to eclipse former achievements or to outdo others in mastery, and so in a very definite sense he may be said to be more convinced and more earnest than Dürer, whose stupendous manual dexterity is apt to become tyrannical and fall into merely frigid display. It is the presence of this earnestness and docility which gives his work so original and spontaneous an air, and which has led to the conviction that he engraved his Fall and Redemption of Man himself, although there is no material evidence to prove that this was the case; and, considering the mastery of many engravers of his school whom he might have employed, the supposition is hardly to be called necessary, despite the intuitive calculation on the knife's capacities which the design and workmanship betray. Whether he did engrave them or not, they are more truly wood engravings and less merely pen drawings facsimiled than any others of his time or country, with the sole exception of those by Wolf Huber, his most distinguished pupil, who, it is certainly still less possible to doubt, was his own interpreter.

The wood engraving of the Return of the Spies (B : 42), I think we shall not be wrong in describing as inspired by some plate after or by Mantegna, and we ought in any case to add, most happily inspired.

His work with the burin is experimental without being impatient; and the minuteness and delicacy of his technique are as remarkable as in his best paintings. He seems to have above all aimed at a sort of coloured glow. To the superlative qualities of

monumental build and august design which mark the chief masterpieces of Dürer, he can of course lay no claim, and perhaps it is his highest praise to say, that only occasionally with the burin, and never in work on the wood block, does Dürer surpass him in richness of black and white effect.

No doubt the influence of Dürer is traceable through his work in this medium, but the thing to be remarked is how slight the traces are! how unimportant! The same may be said of several adaptations that he, in common with other artists of the time, has made from Italian nielli. In the case of Dürer it would be wise to desire that Altdorfer should in some respects have been more genuinely his imitator; and yet how can we tell? it might have made him pompous and absurd, as was often the case with Wordsworth imitating Milton.

It is among his works with the burin that are found the chief evidences of his commerce with Italy—copies of figures from Italian engravings very much reduced, and generally with a more intimate charm added, and a composition humoured from bald and rhetorical effect into some kinship with his own more snugly laid-out little plates.

Often it is the treatment of the nude that leads him to study these engravings, such subjects as Venus and Cupid, Lucretia, Apollo and Diana. The sense of harmony in regard to the human figure has been always weak north of the Alps; and early German or Flemish works often seem grotesque, from the absence of any perception that the body is beautiful, as though the blinding power of the Christian superstition in regard to it had been confirmed by the cold which made nudity itself timid and as it were shamefaced. So we can readily understand the fascination such work had for him.

It would be fruitless to go into detailed observations on his technical excellencies; there exists no vocabulary suited to such a purpose, and the uneasy jargons which one is tempted to resort to bring a kind of ridicule upon a subject that those who best understand will be most careful to respect.

There is a considerable use of etching in a few of his plates, and he may probably have often sketched his subject in the first instance thus. The Crucifixion, B. 8, is the most important of those plates which show no trace of an etched line. It has been left unfinished; the figures are exceptionally stately; while

the conception of this lonely cross in the pine wood may serve to bring us back to Altdorfer the poet, the Giorgione of the North, who has banished the two thieves, and banished the soldiers, out of respect for the heart-stricken mourners over whom the beloved Master, Friend, and Son hangs and speaks in his latest solicitude for the disciple whom he best loved, and the mother whom his victory bereaves. Behind, the Franconian mountains have come near, and an old German town, where a memento of this scene will be carved or painted beside every torrent's bridge and wayside fountain, in every bedroom, every council hall, and windowed church.

CONCLUSION

EVERYTHING difficult or laboured must lessen the beauty of a work of art. There must be no trace of more constraint than goes to a labour of love as entrancing and more beneficent than any pleasure.

It is wisdom to go the shortest way to work, and if there is paper and camel's-hair pencil, the easiest line that can be made with the one on the other is that which the true artist will choose as the basis of his workmanship. Of course the easiest line for one hand is not the easiest for another, for one star differs from another star in glory; but it is the same light, the same felicity. Whatever cannot be so rendered, such an one will set aside and determine not to attempt. This delicacy of economy that will never in the least strain the means it employs, is the main condition of that beauty which depends on the handicraft; and there is a kind of artists always inclined to regard this as the only legitimate beauty to be aimed at; and they have reason by just so much as it is true that, however sincerely other beauties may be striven after, if this be neglected or beyond the reach of the aspirant, there can be no real æsthetic success. Even design will be found to depend, in a far greater degree than might seem probable, on a nice appreciation of the capacity of means and material employed. None the less there are other beauties that appeal solely to thought and imagination, a dramatic insight and a dignity of conception which are wholly proper to, and perhaps necessary for, the loftiest flights of art.

Though I have enlarged interpretatively on the beauty of plastic work, there is no need to foster the faintest illusion as to the futility of attempting to render in words the very beauty conveyed in drawing or picture. Bad works of art may furnish

admirable descriptions, as with Keats' "Ode to a Grecian Urn" was the case. And many beautiful pictures have illustrated works of no account in literature, as did Titian's so-called Sacred and Profane Love. However, the greatest artist of modern Germany has shown us that we need not be deterred by this from trying to interpret plastic beauty. He says: "The achievement of the artist—the work of art—is apprehended by others purely in accordance with their own intuitions. How can an artist expect that what he has felt intuitively should be perfectly realised by others, seeing that he himself feels in the presence of his work, if it is true art, that he is confronted by a riddle, about which he too might have illusions, just as another might? Now, would you suppose it possible for an artist to be helped to a clear understanding of his own work by an intelligence other than his own? . . . For I must confess to having arrived at a clear understanding of my own works of art through the help of another, who has provided me with the reasoned conceptions corresponding to my intuitive principles."

Now very likely we may think that "reasoned conceptions" and "intuitive principles" underlying "things of beauty" amuse Germans, even such Germans as Wagner himself, a great deal more than they help or forward them. Yet it is quite true that another's description, or even his mere cry of pleasure, may reveal a beauty that had hitherto remained sealed from us. Even this may be the case, on some quite foreign encounter with thought or phrase or spectacle; the beauty we have studied in vain is suddenly melted in the mind, and afar from the shrine, for a first time we yield heart's worship to its arcana. Then let it not be judged impertinent to say anything about things of beauty which we have been genuinely moved to say. For Chance is a great goddess, and the tone of a voice, a mood, or a smile may better bring beauty home than the most exact analysis. We are in the same case as little children, who must be taught how best they can learn, and not merely in that way which makes exposition most methodical.

What then is it that we may consider ourselves to receive from contemplation of this artist and his works?

First, as with all the less ambitious masters, assurance that attention to the suggestions to be drawn from the materials, the tools, the facilities native to hand and mind, as also to the spirit

really active for him in the chosen subject—that attention to these things results in a man working on in the spirit of tradition even after he has attained to power with which he might set it at nought, and win freedom to express not only the beauty revealed to him, but every eccentricity, desire, or caprice with which he has been saddled by nature. For a tradition is, from the manner of its growth, necessarily founded on experience, and though it may be advanced can never be safely discarded — however it, to an eager and capable intelligence, appear associated with a purblind conservatism of trade-jealousy and craft-bigotry.

Secondly, may we not be thankful that the beauty revealed to Altdorfer, like that of the best tales by Hans Andersen, breathes a spirit of such winsome and cordial homeliness that it actually seems to invite and welcome our study; and that we find it blended with a playfulness which, however fanciful, seems to be saved from the obstinacy and violence of caprice? For these qualities refresh us while they enchant. We are not jaded by the pleasure they impart; nor do they leave us “high-sorrowful and cloyed.”

Thirdly, his work, with its profound pathos and exhilarating landscape beauty, frequently raises us towards the region of the most lofty, most serious art; while his skill with pencil, burin, knife, and pigment introduces us into the near neighbourhood of masters of the highest rank, such as Rembrandt, Dürer, and Van Eyck, however much he may fall short of their intellectual range, their unflagging seriousness, their exhaustive science.

His worldly success no doubt depended on yet other qualities and on the stirring spirit of the times in which he lived, that was ready to welcome every adventurous effort directed towards truth, goodness, or beauty, with an enthusiasm which is apt to win from us nowadays a disillusioned smile such as the middle-aged too often award to virtues of the young which put them to shame.

If a thought for our warning should be added to the consideration of the excellencies of this helpful artist, let it be in the words of him who with most authority has written in English upon painting: “Art has its boundaries though imagination has none.” Yes, Reynolds is right, and artists “need not be mortified or discouraged at not being able to execute the conceptions of a romantic imagination.” We feel how right he was, when, on turning to the works of Arnold Böcklin, so admired to-day in Germany, we see that the vulgarising and ignorant licence too

often characteristic of modernity has played havoc with endowments which, though always perhaps more vigorous than delicate, might originally have claimed some kinship with those of Altdorfer. But Altdorfer himself would undoubtedly not have been so secure from similar temptations had he not been safeguarded by the discipline of a living tradition.

To Germany, who sustained him with her characteristic prudence, humble industry, and patient application, he should appear as a prophet—even as all those who, in the past, have gone on before, should rightly be considered—a prophet who promises that their virtues of industry and application shall be united not only, as Dürer and Holbein proclaim, with supreme dignity and perfect balance, but with that sweetness and buoyancy which form the charmed atmosphere of the noblest efforts of Greece and Italy.

NOTE I. PAGE 32.

The Pictures which form the first class of Paintings are :—

1. The Battle of Arbela. Dated 1529. Altdorfer's largest work, measuring 141 × 119 centimetres. In the Pinakothek, Munich, 290.
2. Susanna at the Bath. Dated 1526. Also in the Pinakothek at Munich, 289 (75 × 61).
3. St. George. A tiny picture, measuring 27 × 21, and dated 1510. Munich Pinakothek, 288.
4. The Flight into Egypt. The Holy Family are resting by a fountain. Dated 1510. Berlin Museum, 638B (57 × 38).
5. The Coronation of the Virgin. No date; monogram. At Munich, 291 (66 × 38). The Resurrection Morning, a sketch, is on the back of the panel.
6. A classical subject representing a Satyr, a naked woman, and a child. Possibly Dejanira and Nessus. This picture should be compared with the St. George. It is dated 1507. Berlin, 638A.
7. A Nativity in the Snow. No date; monogram. At Vienna, No. 1427.
8. St. Joseph, the Virgin and Child, and St. John. Dated 1515; monogram (23 × 21). No. 1422 in Vienna Gallery. It is to be remarked that the figures in this little panel being quite as large in scale as the more part in pictures of the second class, difference in scale cannot account for the wide divergence in skill and method which divides the two classes.
9. Crucifixion (41 × 33). Nuremberg, German Museum, 213. Dated 1526 (acc. to Friedländer; formerly read 1506). Monogram.
10. Two panels, St. Francis and St. Jerome. At Berlin, No. 638. Dated 1507; monogram (32 × 19 each panel).
11. Wealth and Poverty. Dated 1531; monogram (30 × 42). At Berlin, No. 638D.
12. Crucifixion. Berlin Museum, 638D. No date; no monogram.
13. Two tall panels in the Convent of St. Florian, near Enns. Nos. 46 and 47. Commissioned in 1525. They represent the Entombment and the Resurrection, and appear excellent, though hung high in the dark.
14. Nativity. Berlin. No date; no monogram.
15. The Beheading of John the Baptist, in the collection of Ritter von Lanna, which has been attributed to Altdorfer's most distinguished pupil, Wolf Huber, by Dr. Schmidt, but I incline to give it to his master. It is much more finished on the left hand than on the right, and probably reveals something of Altdorfer's method. It is very pleasant in colour, and bears neither date nor monogram.

The Pictures which form the second class are :—

1. The Birth of Mary. Augsburg Gallery, 2, already described, page 14. No date ; no monogram.

2. A picture representing Bathsheba washing her feet in the Danube. In the Museum at Ratisbon it is hung high and in the dark. The colour seems to place it in the second class, but it seems carefully worked. Though it has been attributed to Ostendorfer, both design and invention are of the first order, and I have no hesitation in ascribing it at least in these particulars to Altdorfer. Neither signed nor dated.

3. Three pictures at Nuremberg, and two at Siena, supposed to illustrate the legend of Florian or of Quirinus. These vary much among themselves in point of skill and also of interest as designs. No. 248 at Nuremberg is full of Altdorfer's spirit, and so painted as to make it almost deserve a place in the first class. No. 246 in the same Gallery one would be glad to think he had nothing to do with, though the architectural background is similar in treatment and colour to that in the wonderful Augsburg picture, over which Altdorfer must have presided, and which in point of composition and invention yields to none of his works. I have not seen the pictures of this series at Siena.

4. The St. Florian pictures. Besides the two mentioned in the first class, there are in this beautifully situated Dominican convent eight compositions, measuring 110 x 93, representing the scenes of the Passion. They are very direct, though careless in handling, crude in colour, and not matured as compositions. That representing the Crucifixion has the same arrangement of crosses as in the pen and wash drawing in the Albertina, No. 49, of which there are replicas or copies in Ritter von Lanna's collection, at Berlin, and in the Louvre. In my opinion none of these drawings are by Altdorfer, but they represent the composition of a picture far more worthy of him than this Crucifixion of St. Florian's.

The types of feature, etc., in these pictures are closely allied to or identical with those in Altdorfer's work, and I believe them to have been produced in his workshop. There are besides four other pictures of like proportions, two of which, the Martyrdom of St. Sebastian, and the Finding of the Body of St. Florian, are very superior in design and invention. The other two deal with the life of the latter saint.

The whole twelve pictures formed an altarpiece à doubles battants, and until forty years ago were joined together in couples, one above the other. They were then cleaned by Enders of Vienna, sawn apart, and reframed. Two large and tall panels, forming together a Gothic arch, represent, that on the left St. Margaret and St. Barbara enthroned, that on the right Dom-Petrus Prepositus kneeling before them in prayer. He it was who commissioned this picture during a journey to Augsburg which he undertook in 1525. The whole altar, which apparently included the two small panels, was erected as a protection against the plague and sudden death, St. Sebastian being joined with the local patron because of his violent end, and SS. Margaret and Barbara as representing the desired triumph over temptations and a happy death. The portrait of Petrus Prepositus is more carefully executed than any other part of the large panels.

In these lists only those pictures which I myself have examined are mentioned ; however, I have little doubt that the St. Hubert at Glasgow and the Nativity at

Bremen would make important additions to the first list, and that there are several of minor importance which belong to it as well.

NOTE II. PAGE 38.

Ritter von Lanna owns several Altdorfer drawings, which, as Dr. Friedländer did not see this collection, I shall enumerate :—

No. 18 in the catalogue of the Klinkosch sale. A small upright drawing. A woman standing on a man in a landscape; she holds flowers caught up with the folds of her skirt. White and black line on fawn-coloured paper. Dated 1509, and signed with monogram. Probably St. Margaret and the Demon.

No. 24 in the catalogue of the Klinkosch sale. A man in slashed sleeves with a spear and sword. On red-brown paper in white and black line. Dated 1512; no monogram. Very beautiful in workmanship.

No. 22 in the catalogue of the Klinkosch sale. A woman with a huge flag, and floating skirts and feathers in her hat; she is dancing. No date; no monogram.

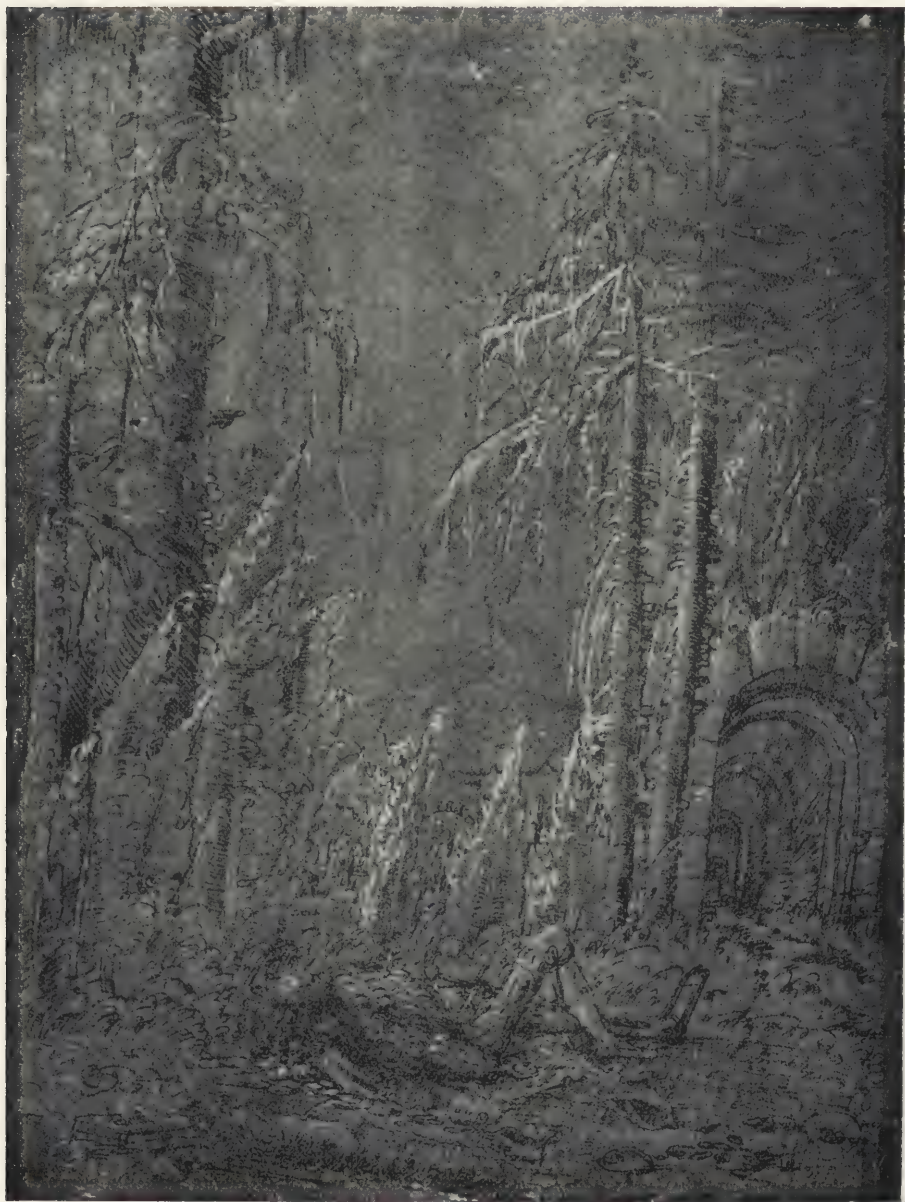
A drawing, black and white line on reddish paper. Dated 1508; no monogram. Open, bold workmanship. A young man with an uprooted sapling on his shoulder coming forward from between two large trees.

A St. George. Dated 1512. On brown paper in black and white line. Very delicate.

A drawing formerly in the Camesina collection. Is probably by Altdorfer. It represents two soldiers, in fine clothes, talking.

NOTE III. (LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS).

The Adoration of the Magi at Sigmaringen, if it is by Altdorfer, must undoubtedly take its place in the first class; Dr. Friedländer and Mr. Campbell Dodgson, who have examined it, consider it to be his, the latter basing his impression on a strong colour resemblance. Dr. Schmidt, however, has doubted it, and from examination of a photograph I am inclined to agree with him. In any case, it would seem hardly possible that it should have been painted ten years before The Coronation of the Virgin, at Munich, as Dr. Friedländer supposes; the drawing of the Child is so much more academical in conception and aim.



PYRAMUS DEAD: a drawing in the Berlin Print Room.





THE HOLY FAMILY AT THE FOUNTAIN: in the Berlin Gallery.





THE BIRTH OF THE VIRGIN: in the Augsburg Gallery.





SUSANNA AT THE BATH: in the Munich Gallery.





THE BATTLE OF ARBELA: in the Munich Gallery.





THE SATYR FAMILY; in the Berlin Gallery.





THE NATIVITY: in the Vienna Gallery.





THE SACRIFICE OF ABRAHAM: a drawing in the Albertina, Vienna.





THE DEPARTURE OF QUIRINUS: in the Siena Gallery.





ST. GEORGE: in the Munich Gallery.





THE AGONY IN THE GARDEN: a drawing in the Berlin Print Room.





THE ADORATION OF THE MAGI: in the Sigmaringen Gallery.



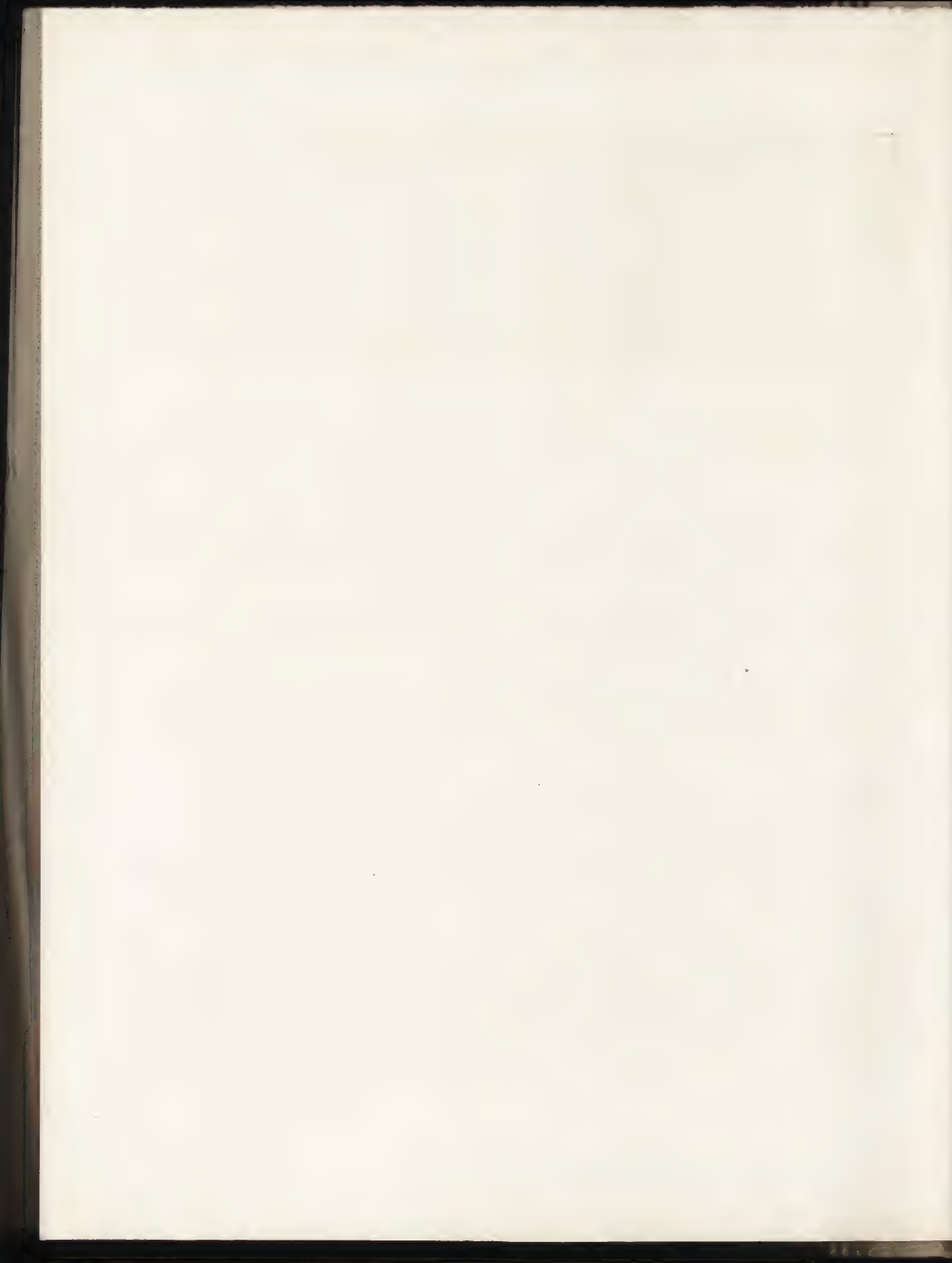


THE MARTYRDOM OF QUIRINUS: in the Siena Gallery.





THE ADORATION OF THE MAGI: a drawing in the Berlin Print Room.





POVERTY AND RICHES; in the Berlin Gallery.





MADONNA AND CHILD; in the Munich Gallery.









THE MADONNA WITH THE CRADLE.



ST. CHRISTOPHER.

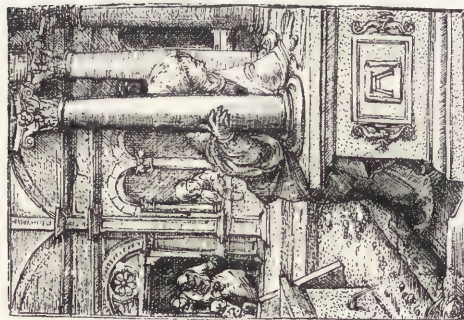




THE DEATH OF DIDO.



THE CENTAUR.



THE VIRGIN IN THE SYNAGOGUE.





THE CRUCIFIXION.













THE RETURN OF THE SPIES.





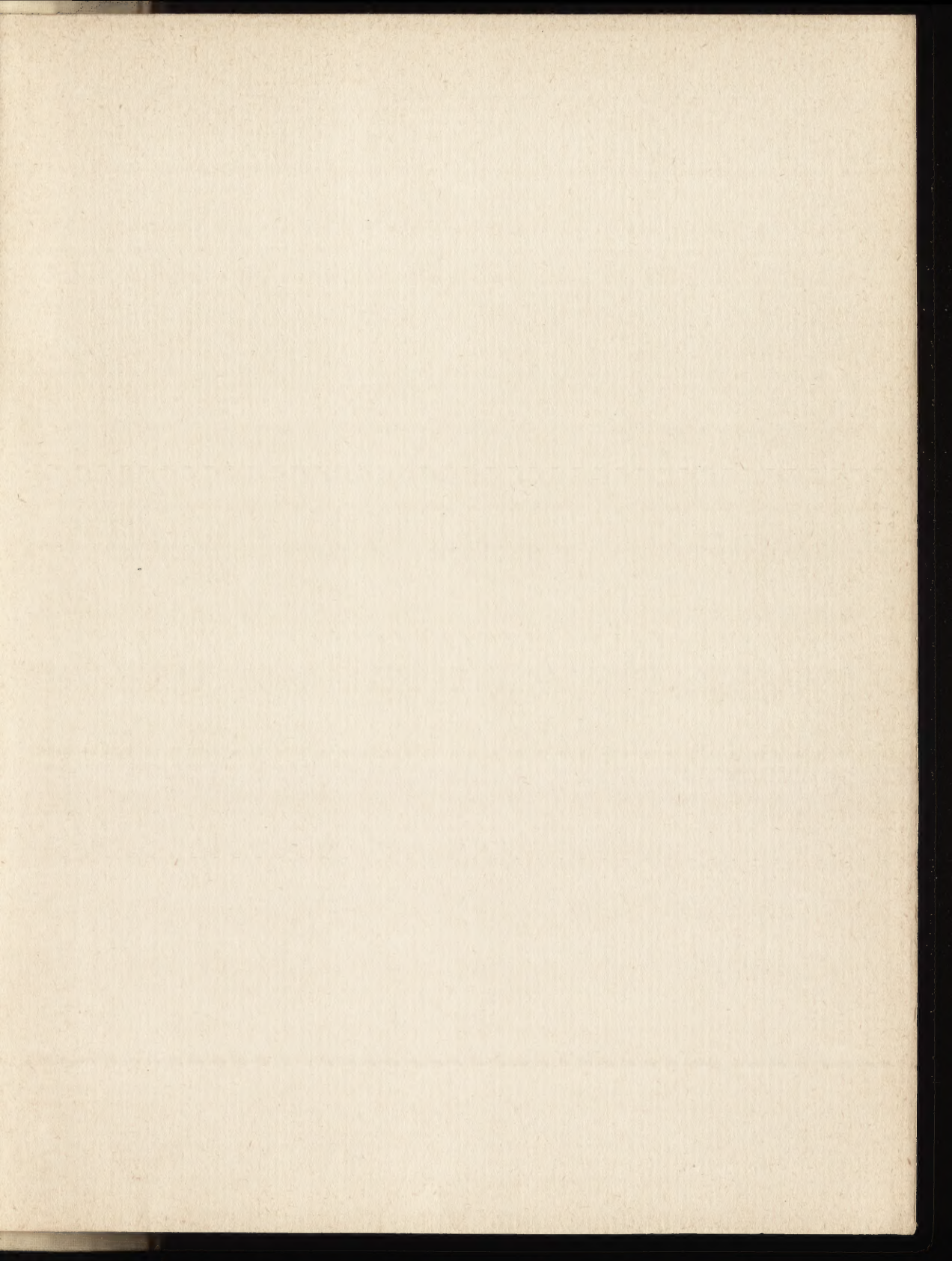
THE ADORATION OF THE SHEPHERDS.



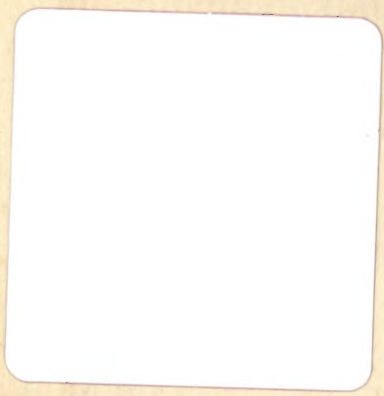


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